



## TOWN OF DELAFIELD HISTORY

For centuries what is now the Town of Delafield was a wilderness where wild animals roamed – white-tailed deer, wolves, foxes, rabbits, raccoons, beaver, wapiti (elk), black bears, pumas and bobcats. The landscape was covered by trees, including maple, oak, basswood, ash, chestnut and elm. Native American Indians lived in the Town of Delafield for a long time, as was recently verified with the discovery of ancient human bones on West Main Street in what is now the City of Delafield in 1992. It is believed that the Winnebago Indians, who are related to the Sioux Indians, lived in Waukesha County and most likely in Delafield. However, they were displaced by the Potawatomi and Algonquin tribes.

The first written records of the Town of Delafield were made by surveyors. Deacon Schuyler was credited as the first white settler who came to the area in the spring of 1837. He only stayed for a short time and then moved to the adjacent Town of Summit. Therefore, Albert Campbell, who arrived in the Town of Delafield later in 1837, is often thought of as the first settler, since he remained in Delafield and became the first permanent white settler. More Town of Delafield settlers arrived in 1837, the majority of whom relocated from New England and New York State. Those that are documented include Henry E. Skinner, George E. Skinner, Edwin Skinner, E. Melvin Skinner, Gaylord Ellsworth, Homer S. Finley, D.W. Kellogg, George Paddock and Millard Hughson.

The first school was held in the Warren family home with Mrs. Warren's first class consisting of 12 students. The first general store was opened in 1843 by proprietor Albert Alden. One of the first physicians in Delafield was Dr. Alfred L. Castleman. Nelson Paige Hawks came to Delafield and built his first hotel around 1840. Hawks gained the most fame as the proprietor of the Hawks House. He and his wife, Hannah, built Hawks House in 1846 on the principal north-south streets of Delafield, Genesee Street. Hawks House is known today as "Hawks Inn", which has been preserved and restored, and was moved to its present location on Wells Street in 1960. It is now open six months of the year as a museum operated by the Hawks Inn Historical Society. Hawks also became Delafield's first postmaster and was also a miller. The mill still stands today along the Bark River and has been converted into a residence. Hawks' son, Nelson Crocker Hawks, started Delafield's first newspaper, Young America, in the 1860's though it only lasted a few years and sold for 10 cents a copy.

The name Delafield is said to have come from an early settler, Dr. Charles Delafield. The village area, which is now the City of Delafield, was generally referred to as Delafield. While various sources indicate Delafield was originally called Hayopolis, upon researching material in Milwaukee Sentinel files, Margaret Zerwekh discovered that the original name was Oakland until August 21, 1842. The entire town was then a part of the Town of Warren and also included what is now known as the Town of Merton. Mrs. Zerwekh further discovered that the State Legislature approved the division of the Town of Warren into the Town of Merton and the Town of Nemahbin on April 17, 1843. Though the name Nemahbin can still be found on two nearby lakes in the Town of Summit, on January 26, 1844, the State Legislature approved a request to change the name from the Town of Nemahbin to the Town of Delafield. During the time the township was still referred to as the Town of Warren, Dr. Milton Cushing was elected and served as the first Town Chairman on January 5, 1842. It was 1957 when mass meetings were held in the Town of Delafield to consider incorporation of the whole township as a city. Those in favor contended that this would bring more state highway aids and that Delafield boundaries would be protected from annexation by other communities. However, the idea of becoming a city was not popular with many Delafield residents, particularly in rural areas.

Those in favor of incorporation decided to reduce the potential city to a 10 square mile area with the "village" as the center including most of Nagawicka Lake. The Delafield Incorporation Committee was formed in April 1958. The committee voted to seek a referendum on city status and petitions were circulated. Town officials, however, were opposed and the matter went to court in Waukesha. After the Circuit Court ordered that a referendum be held, the town decided to appeal the decision on a 2-1 vote. Arguments for and against incorporation went on for months until finally, on May 5, 1959, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled in favor of the referendum. The referendum was held in June of 1959 and incorporation won by the small margin of 75 votes. In the subsequent city election, Raymond "Duke" Wandschneider, retiring town chairman, was picked as the first mayor. The first City Council meetings were held in Kettle Moraine Bank. In 1960, the new city purchased the old Cushing School on Genesee Street for \$26,500, which became the first City Hall. The Town Board was considering the purchase of the same school for town hall use at the time the city broke away. The town hall of that time was on Genesee Street and remained as the town hall for some time after the city was incorporated. The first town clerk was Elias Palmer and in 1842, at the time of the first town meeting, the total wealth of the town was assessed at \$11,345.32, including \$9,815.32 for real estate and \$1,530 for personal property.

House numbers and street signs came to what was known as Delafield village in 1953, while it was still part of the Town of Delafield. The area was not incorporated as a city until 1959. The village was developed like any other village or city, with a regular street pattern and houses on regular lots, but until 1953, addresses were hard to locate due to the lack of house numbers and the fact that while streets were named, the names were not posted. Money for the street signs and house numbers was raised by the Chamber of Commerce under President Al P. Nelson. The village was measured so each house would be numbered properly and they saw that each household received a number.

A major Hollywood motion picture was partially filmed in Delafield in 1942 by Paramount Pictures. It was "The Major and The Minor," starring Ray Milland and Ginger Rogers. Those stars did not come to Delafield, but important background scenes were filmed at St. John's Military Academy, which for film purposes was transformed into the fictitious Wallace Military Institute. The movie was released in the fall of 1942 and was rated highly.

Among Delafield's claims to fame is the fact that it was the site of a Wisconsin state fish hatchery from 1907 to 1953. The facilities included a large stone building and several ponds. Fish propagated there included bass, walleyed pike, and northern pike. When propagation was halted, the hatchery was used for experimental work by the Department of Natural Resources for a number of years until it was turned over to the City of Delafield in 1979.